A Map for Your Journey
It is good to have an end to journey toward, but it is the journey that matters in the end. Ursula K. LeGuin

BUILD A TEAM
Developing and implementing a successful treatment plan requires a team approach. Ideally, family members and teachers are the core members of the team. Therapists, doctors, day care providers and friends should all be invited to participate as members of the team. In order for the team to be effective, all team members need to show respect for the individual with the disability, regard parents as experts on their children and convey a sense of hope. Working together, team members develop a treatment plan. Team members need to set up a way to share information about which aspects of the plan are working and which need to be rethought. Not all team members will participate in every decision, but all need to be kept informed with phone calls or e-mail.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS
One of your main responsibilities as a parent of a child with a disability is to be an effective advocate for your child, protecting his/her rights. In order to be a good advocate, you need to know what your child is entitled to by law. Two important laws that protect the rights of people with disabilities are the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). In addition to knowing your rights, it helps to have a clear idea of what to ask for. Always try to be diplomatic, and keep a record of each interaction. The records will be useful if you need to move up the chain of command.

CONNECT WITH OTHER FAMILIES
It is important to remember that you are not alone. Many other families have come before you and can share their experiences with you. In addition to providing emotional support, parents can offer insight on many important matters. For example, they know what help is available in your community and how to access it. Parents can also share information on which intervention strategies have worked with their children. Another important reason to develop relationships with other parents is that there is strength in numbers. Thus, government officials are making decisions that affect your child. It is powerful to have a group of vocal parents advocating for their children.

EXPLORE COMMUNITY RESOURCES
Federal, state and private agencies exist to help families of children with disabilities. Each agency offers different kinds of help, has its own application process and uses different criteria to determine who is eligible. Since many agencies have a waiting list, it is wise to apply as soon as possible, ideally before you really need the help. Getting help often requires persistence.

INDIVIDUALIZE TREATMENT
Each person with ASD has a unique profile of strengths and needs, so treatment must be tailored to the individual. There are dozens of intervention strategies from which to choose. You can learn about your options by going to trainings and workshops, reading books and articles and talking to other parents and professionals. You will want to find out whether or not the treatment has been scientifically validated. Because there is no cure for ASD, you will want to be skeptical of treatments that claim to cure autism. Also be wary of treatments that promise quick results. Typically, good treatment results in slow, steady progress, not miraculous results that promise quick results.

Prioritize
Perhaps the hardest thing to do is to figure out where to start. It may feel like there is so much to do that it could never all be done. It is true that there is a lot to do. Overwhelmed by possibilities, you may feel unable to act. But there are many ways to get the ball rolling. Start by asking yourself, your children and other people who care about your child with ASD to name the one issue that would improve the child’s quality of life. Then Centralized Planning is another useful brainstorming tool to help you prioritize and imagine your child’s ideal future. Is she living at home, with a roommate or alone? Does she have a job? Is she going to college? How is she obtaining her transportation? In this age, which believes that there is a short cut to everything, the greatest lesson to be learned is that the most difficult way is, in the long run, the easiest.

Henry Miller